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PRIORITY THEMES

PEACE: EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN ALL EFFORTS TO PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, PEACE AND DISARMAMENT

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The Commission on the Status of Women, at its 1987 session, selected "Equal participation in all efforts to promote international cooperation, peace and disarmament" as the priority theme under the objective of peace for consideration at its thirty-sixth session. It became evident during the analysis prepared for the Commission at its thirty-fourth session that the fact that few women were involved in decision-making related to peace, international cooperation and disarmament was closely related to women's absence generally from decision-making. The present report deals with the broader question of how women participate in public life and decision-making and with the issues that engage their attention, including those related to peace and international cooperation. The report provides an analysis of new data on the participation of women in parliaments and Governments worldwide. Factors and conditions enabling and stimulating women's participation in public life and decision-making are identified. The report presents an analysis of cases from the few countries where women have participated in decision-making in large enough numbers to demonstrate their distinct attitudes and views, as well as examples of women making a difference at the grass-roots level. It also presents the argument that if women were involved on an equal basis in political life, including decision-making, they would make a qualitative difference, in terms of content and style, to the benefit of society. Measures aimed at the speedy achievement of democracy for all are identified.

*E/CN.6/1992/1.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission on the Status of Women, at its 1987 session, selected "Equal participation in all efforts to promote international cooperation, peace and disarmament" as one of its priority themes under the objective of peace. That decision was subsequently endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1987/24.

2. The examination by the Commission at its thirty-sixth session of the issue of equal participation in all efforts to promote international cooperation, peace and disarmament constitutes the third stage of its consideration of the broader issue of the participation of women in politics and decision-making. The outcome of the first stage was presented to the Commission at its thirty-third session in the report of the Secretary-General on the full participation of women in the construction of their countries and in the creation of just social and political systems (E/CN.6/1989/7). That report emphasized the political participation of women on a collective basis, in parliaments, political parties, trade unions and women's organizations. The report of the Secretary-General on equality in political participation and decision-making (E/CN.6/1990/2 and Corr.1), presented to the Commission at its thirty-fourth session for the second stage of its examination of the subject, dealt with the quantitative participation of women in decision-making in the public sector, in particular in Governments as prime ministers, cabinet ministers, their aides and advisers, as well as senior civil servants.

3. In the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women 1/ the interrelationship of the objectives of equality, development and peace at the national and international levels is stressed. The role of international cooperation in achieving peace is also stressed. There is also a close relationship between the status of women at the national level and their involvement in the peace process and international cooperation. It became evident during the analysis prepared for the Commission at its thirty-fourth session that there were almost no women involved in decision-making related to peace, international cooperation and disarmament at the national level; and there were almost none in those areas at the international level because decision makers there were selected from the ranks of national decision makers.

4. The issue raised by the priority theme, therefore, has to be seen as part of the broader problem of equal participation of women in the decision-making process at the national level. The present report deals with the wider question of how women participate and with the issues that engage their attention, including issues related to international cooperation. It presents the argument that if women were involved on an equal basis in all efforts to promote international cooperation, peace and disarmament, that is, if they were present in appropriate numbers, they would make a qualitative difference in how those issues were dealt with. The underrepresentation of women at the highest national decision-making levels, however, limits the analysis to those few cases in which women have participated in large enough numbers to make a difference or have at least demonstrated their distinct attitudes and views. The analysis focuses on governmental decision-making. It can be argued that the participation of women at the community and grass-roots levels is higher,

particularly in non-governmental organizations, but those activities per se are not the subject of the present report.*

5. The preparation of the priority theme was intended to draw on the results of an interregional consultation on women in public life, which was to be held at Vienna in 1991 but had to be postponed. The General Assembly, in its resolution 46/98, noted the relevance of the consultation to the preparation of the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace and requested that the Commission at its thirty-sixth session make recommendations to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council for the convening of the consultation not later than 1993.

6. As called for in Economic and Social Council resolution 1987/24, an expert group was convened to examine some of the issues related to the preparation of the work of the Commission on the priority theme. The present report draws on the results of the meeting of the Expert Group on the Role of Women in Public Life, held at Vienna from 21 to 24 May 1991; the draft platform recommended by the Expert Group is contained in the annex. The report also utilizes new statistical data compiled by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Office at Vienna on women as heads of Government, as cabinet ministers and their equivalent, and as senior civil servants, as well as data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on women in parliaments.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7. Throughout the world, women have had the right to vote and to hold office for a considerable time. They have always been part of the political process and have contributed to the public good. They have, however, been generally absent from key areas of governmental decision-making. Only a few countries have achieved the target of increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions to at least 30 per cent by 1995, in accordance with recommendation VI of the recommendations and conclusions emanating from the first review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies to the year 2000 (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/15, annex), and that proportion is growing at an exceedingly slow rate. As a result, women's participation in politics and decision-making is the area where the gap between de jure and de facto equality remains the greatest.

8. The low number of women in positions at the decision-making level, whether related to peace and international cooperation or to other matters of public concern, results in their interests not being properly represented at that level; women's choices and opinions cannot influence key decisions on national and international policies. Women are de facto deprived of important rights and responsibilities as citizens. Society and the international community are deprived of women's perspectives and skills. With women absent from politics and decision-making the process cannot be considered truly democratic.

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*This issue will be presented under the objective of peace to the Commission at its thirty-seventh session in a report of the Secretary-General on women and the peace process. That report will also deal with the participation of women at the international level - in international organizations and as members of delegations to permanent and temporary international bodies involved in various aspects of peace.

9. At the meeting of the Expert Group on the Role of Women in Public Life, a number of distinct perspectives that women had on issues of concern to society as a whole were identified. The Expert Group found that women's specific contributions to public life included a particular concern for justice and ethics; an ability to set priorities and balance competing demands; a concern for future generations; and a recognition of the significance of adequate public investment in education, social services and environmental protection as a way of preparing today for the future. Such perspectives could enrich the consideration of those issues.

10. There is evidence that women can only make a significant difference in politics when their participation reaches a minimum level, what is termed a "critical mass". Although this critical mass, usually set at at least 30 per cent, has been achieved at the national decision-making level in only a few countries, there is some indication that when women act in solidarity they are able to make a visible impact on political decisions and agendas, as well as on attitudes, behaviour and style. Mainly because of pressure exerted by women, issues that had long been ignored or considered private, such as equal rights, women's control over their own bodies, child care, and protection against sexual violence, have gradually been included on national political agendas. There is evidence that women would give a different perspective to issues as diverse as disarmament and the environment.

11. There is also evidence that women in large enough numbers can change the decision-making styles used in public bodies. In local councils in a number of countries where women have achieved a critical mass, women have created a more collaborative atmosphere, have sought consensus rather than confrontational solutions, and have been less formalistic, more pragmatic, and more open to direct cooperation with people.

12. The slow progress towards de facto equality in political participation and decision-making implies that there is a need for new measures and policies. As in other areas of advancement of women, the responsibility for action lies with Governments, non-governmental organizations and women themselves.

13. Governments should make efforts to implement the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council relating to participation, particularly recommendation VI of Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/15, annex.

14. Women should make use of their rights to vote and to hold office. They should, however, recognize that in democracies rights must also be seen as responsibilities for making public choices and implementing them. As stated in the draft platform recommended by the Expert Group on the Role of Women in Public Life, "participation is the responsibility of all citizens. Effective solutions to international, national and local problems can best be found when all citizens can exercise on an equal basis their right to participate fully in decision-making."

15. Non-governmental organizations should play an active role in increasing the political participation of women. They should motivate and encourage women by building coalitions; by strengthening women's networks and solidarity; by organizing campaigns to raise consciousness; by offering training in women's rights, legal literacy and participation in politics; by promoting role models focusing on successful women politicians; by disseminating and popularizing material on equality, including relevant United Nations documents; and by

working towards expanding national and international statistics and research to include gender-disaggregated data on women in society. Non-governmental organizations should also intensify their efforts to remove demeaning stereotypes, as well as other constraints to women's participation, and to combat violence against women and other forms of debasement and oppression directed against women.

16. Efforts to achieve equality between women and men in political participation and decision-making as an essential means of achieving equality, development and peace should be given priority at the national level in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

17. In order to dispel the stereotype about women's increased participation not making a difference in politics and decision-making, United Nations entities should continue their studies of the issue, in collaboration with research institutes, universities and professional associations, with a view to issuing a publication or publications prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women. United Nations entities should, in particular, examine the difference women can and do make in the areas of peace, international cooperation and disarmament.

I. THE PARADOX OF EQUAL RIGHTS AND UNEQUAL PRACTICE

18. One of the most significant gaps between de jure and de facto equality is in the participation of women in politics and decision-making. Despite the long-term existence of international norms and national practice that guarantee women the right to vote and to hold office, the proportion of women elected to office or serving in governmental decision-making positions is very low.

19. At the international level, the principle of equality between women and men in terms of political participation is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III)), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (see General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Optional Protocol (see General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex). Non-discriminatory equal political participation of women is explicitly provided in articles I-III of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (see General Assembly resolution 640 (VII)). Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (see General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex) obligates States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination of women in the political and public life of the country and to ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to vote and to be eligible for election, the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and its implementation and the right to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country. Article 8 requires States parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure to women the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

20. Women have the legal right to vote and hold office in almost every country of the world. Most women have had that right for almost their entire adult lives. There are few legal barriers to women's full participation in decision-making. But in the executive summary of the report of the Secretary-General on progress at the national, regional and international levels in the

implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies (E/CN.6/1990/5, paragraph 11), submitted to the Commission at its thirty-fourth session, it is stated that "despite the fact that most countries ... use democratic methods of choosing political leaders and making policy choices, and that women make up half of the electorates, relatively few women reach the highest levels of political participation and even fewer become public decision makers" and that women are largely absent in all forums where policy decisions affecting women's daily lives are being made. Thus, women in all countries share a common condition: they are not full participants in the public choices that affect their lives.

21. The above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General was based on an analysis of information up to 1987. As part of the preparation of the present report, figures on the incidence of women in governmental decision-making positions were updated by the Division for the Advancement of Women to reflect the situation in 1990. New figures on the incidence of women in parliaments have recently been issued by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. They indicate little change over the intervening period of three or four years.

22. Women's absence at the highest decision-making level is striking. Only 18 women have ever been elected as head of State or Government in independent countries. This means that only about 5 per cent of the countries in the world have been led by women. The recency of the phenomenon is illustrated by the fact that all but two of those 18 women are still alive. In November 1991, eight of those women were still in office, the largest number in history.

23. In 1990 there were regional variations in the proportion of women in parliaments and in the changes that had occurred since 1975 and 1987 (see table 1). There was, on average, a decline in the proportion of women in parliaments from 1987 to 1990, but that was largely accounted for by a dramatic decrease in the figure for Eastern Europe. That reflected the fact that, prior to the current reform period, there had been a tendency to allocate parliamentary seats by social groups, in which women were considered a specific category. In addition, the averages for countries of the Western European and other group were high mostly because of the influence of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), where the figure has always been high.

Table 1. Proportion of women in positions in lower or unicameral chambers of parliament, by region, 1975, 1987 and 1990
(Percentage average)

Region	1975	1987	1990
Africa	3.9	6.7	7.2
Asia and the Pacific	6.3	6.1	5.5
Eastern Europe	24.1	26.6	10.8
Latin America and the Carribean	4.9	7.4	9.3

continued

Table 1 (continued)

Region	1975	1987	1990
Western Europe and other	6.7 a/	12.5 b/	14.3 c/
World	7.7	9.3	8.8

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union reports, 1987 and 1991.

a/ If the Nordic countries (average: 16.1 per cent) are excluded, the percentage drops to 4.3.

b/ If the Nordic countries (average: 29.3 per cent) are excluded, the percentage drops to 8.5.

c/ If the Nordic countries (average: 33.8 per cent) are excluded, the percentage drops to 9.9.

24. Six countries (Cuba, Denmark, Finland, Guyana, Norway and Sweden) have achieved the target set by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1990/15, annex, of increasing to at least 30 per cent by 1995 the proportion of women in leadership positions. In ten other countries, however, the proportion of women in parliament increased by over 6 per cent between 1987 and 1990.

25. The incidence of women in governmental decision-making positions was lower than that in parliaments in both 1987 and 1990 (see table 2). The overall increase over time was very slight both at the ministerial level (0.7 per cent) and at the four highest levels of decision-making combined (0.5 per cent). The largest increases were registered in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean. Of the 10 countries ranked highest in terms of the percentage of women in positions at the four highest levels of decision-making, six were in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although the number of countries having no women in positions at the ministerial level was 83 in 1990, that figure compares favourably with that for 1987: 100 countries.

Table 2. Proportion of women in different governmental decision-making positions, by region, 1987 and 1990
(Percentage)

Region	Ministerial level		Four highest levels	
	1987	1990	1987	1990
Africa	2.5	3.0	3.5	3.4
Asia and the Pacific	1.2	2.1	1.7	2.0
Eastern Europe	4.6	4.0	3.7	4.3

continued

Table 2 (continued)

Region	Ministerial level 1987	Ministerial level 1990	Four highest levels 1987	Four highest levels 1990
Latin America and the Carribean	2.7	5.1	5.9	7.8
Western Europe and other	8.6	7.6	7.2	7.6
World	3.3	4.0	4.1	4.6

Source: Compiled from National Standards Association, World-wide Government Directory of 1987-1988 (Bethesda, Maryland, 1987) and National Standards Association, World-wide Government Directory of 1990 (Bethesda, Maryland, 1990).

26. The latest data confirm the trend noted in 1987 that women are heavily concentrated in social ministries, half of the 146 women at the ministerial level in 1990 being assigned to those ministries. Despite that trend, however, the proportion of women in positions at the ministerial level in the social field in 1990 was only 9.5 per cent. The underrepresentation of women in key political fields related to peace and disarmament, such as foreign affairs, the interior, and defence, is demonstrated by the fact that only 12 women in 10 countries occupied such positions in 1990. Women were present at the four highest levels of decision-making in political fields in only 36 countries.

27. The underrepresentation of women in such positions at the national level has consequences for women's representation in the peace process at the international level, since participants at that level tend to be recruited from among national decision makers. For example, women are scarcely represented among the government-appointed directors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and among the top executives of those organizations, since such persons are selected from the top ranks of government. Similarly, women are not likely to be involved in disarmament talks because they do not reach high positions in the national ministries involved in that area. For example, in the Vienna Talks on Mutual Reduction of Forces and Armaments and Associated Measures in Central Europe, held between 1975 and 1986, there were only 10 women in 19 delegations. Nearly all of them participated only at the end of that period.

28. Comparing the incidence of women in different types of decision-making positions over time reveals the complexity of the factors at work. Table 3 shows correlation coefficients among various statistical indicators. It is clear that although there is some correlation between those indicators, that correlation is not perfect. For example, while most countries with a high percentage of women in positions at the ministerial level in 1987 had a high percentage in 1990, there was still considerable fluctuation. There was a higher correlation between women being in parliament and in ministerial-level positions because ministers were often recruited from parliament. The correlation between women being in parliament and in the top four levels of decision-making, however, was not nearly as high. For example, even in the Nordic countries there was a higher proportion of women at the ministerial level than in decision-making positions below the ministerial level.

Table 3. Correlation coefficients between women in different governmental decision-making positions
(Highest correlation = 1.00; no correlation = 0.00)

Indicator and year	Percentage of women in positions at the four highest levels (1990)	Percentage of women in positions at the ministerial level (1990)
Percentage of women in parliament (1990)	0.36	0.49
Percentage of women in positions at the four highest levels (1987)	0.67	0.44
Percentage of women in positions at the ministerial level (1987)	0.47	0.69

Source: Based on information from the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

29. In order to examine factors related to why some countries had higher proportions of women in decision-making positions and others did not, an effort was made to correlate different legal, economic and social indicators. From that analysis, it was possible to draw several empirical conclusions.

30. Clearly a State's commitment to women's rights is important. That commitment is often expressed by adhering to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. States that have ratified or acceded to the Convention without substantive reservations (i.e. have not entered reservations based on customs, religion or tradition) have higher average percentages of women in decision-making positions, in both government and parliament, than States that have not yet demonstrated that commitment (see table 4).

Table 4. Status of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in countries and the percentage of women in different governmental decision-making positions, 1987 and 1990

Status of the Convention	Percentage of women in positions at the ministerial level		Percentage of women in positions at the four highest levels	
	1987	1990	1987	1990
Ratified	5.5	5.9	4.9	5.5
Ratified with reservations	2.6	4.1	1.8	2.6
Signed only	3.9	3.5	4.2	3.2
None of the above	1.9	2.6	0.5	1.6
World	3.3	4.0	4.1	4.6

31. There is also a correlation between a number of indicators of the de facto status of women in a country, in terms of access to education and to particular occupations (see table 5). The longer-term effect of access to education can be seen in the high correlation between the ratio of women to men in second-level education in 1970 and the percentage of women in decision-making positions in 1990. The correlation was not as high when educational statistics from 1980 or later were used. It was higher in relation to the proportion of women in positions at the top four levels of decision-making than at the ministerial level. One question that deserves further study is whether the effect of increased educational equality can be attributed to the increased availability of qualified women for the labour force from which top government officials are selected or to a more educated electorate.

Table 5. Correlation coefficients between the percentage of women in different governmental decision-making positions and other indicators (Highest correlation = 1.00; no correlation = 0.00)

Indicator and year		Percentage of women in positions at the four highest levels (1990)	Percentage of women in positions at the ministerial level (1990)
Ratio of women to men in second-level education	(1970)	0.39	0.21
Ratio of women to men in third-level education	(1980)	0.31	0.12
Ratio of women to men in professional occupations	(1985)	0.34	0.28
Ratio of women to men in administrative occupations	(1985)	0.32	0.34
Real GDP per capita	(1986)	0.29	0.28

Source: Women's Indicators and Statistics Data Base, 1990, and from United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 1991 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991).

32. The importance of university-level education as a means of preparing for leadership is shown by the correlation between the ratio of women to men in third-level education and the percentage of women in governmental decision-making positions. There is a high correlation between equal access to education and the proportion of women in leadership positions in government (see table 5).

33. Similarly, the availability of employment in professions and in administration and management, which forms a part of the pool from which decision makers in government are largely drawn, is also an important factor in explaining why some countries have a higher percentage of women in decision-making positions than others.

34. A slight correlation now exists between the wealth of a country as expressed in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and the proportion of

women in decision-making positions. It cannot be said, however, that this means that national wealth is a precondition for having a higher proportion of women in decision-making positions. First, the correlation is not particularly high. Many of the countries with a high proportion of women in decision-making positions are relatively poor. Secondly, national wealth is associated with other indicators, such as women's access to education and employment, that have a higher correlation with the proportion of women in decision-making positions.

35. Research on decision-making data for 1987 suggests that the more transparent and democratic a system is and the more clearly defined its criteria for selecting candidates and officials are, the more women can be found in decision-making positions.* For example, the proportion of women in decision-making positions is on average higher in countries with two or more political parties than in those with one or none. In closed systems with unspecified means of selection, dominated by informal networks and secrecy, women are clearly at a disadvantage.

II. DIFFERENCES WOMEN CAN MAKE

36. The participation of women in decision-making bodies can be seen in terms of women's formal access to decision-making and public policy institutions as reflected in their presence within the various executive and legislative bodies, with respect to positions and hierarchy, substantive areas and influence. Complete organizational integration of women would imply equal distribution of positions between the genders in all those institutions. Women's participation can also be examined in terms of such questions as under what circumstances and to what extent women can make a difference in public policy, in terms of affecting the outcome of policies and bringing about change within the institutions and their ways of operating.

37. The underrepresentation of women in legislative and executive branches of government and the extremely slow rate of progress made in that area are shown in section I above. The question of what difference it would make if there were more women in decision-making positions is complicated by the fact that it is often asserted that women in such positions do not act differently from men. If that were the case, there would be no change in the substance of politics or decision-making if more women participated. And if that were true, there would be no reason to have more women in those positions other than to achieve a semblance of formal "democracy".

38. The question of difference turns in part on the question of whether a minimum level of participation, a critical mass, must be reached for women to be able to act differently from men. It has been estimated, based on evidence from socio-psychological studies of the behaviour of minorities in task-oriented groups, that in order to bring substantive difference into decision-making in terms of content and priorities, as well as style and working climate, the critical mass must be at least 30-35 per cent. Such a minimum level of participation would enable a minority to influence the culture of the group.

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*The results of this research will be presented in a United Nations study entitled Women and Politics and Decision-making in the Late Twentieth Century, forthcoming.

39. Women have achieved a critical mass at the national decision-making level in only a few countries, particularly the Nordic countries. Empirical studies in those countries have shown that when women act in solidarity they are able to make a visible impact on political decisions and political culture.* For example, in the Nordic countries, women in politics have changed people's attitudes towards women as leaders, have placed on public agendas issues about which women expressed concern, such as social support services, equality, health care, protection against violence, and have changed the political culture, making it more participatory and diversified. The Greens, a new political movement in which women have played a leading role from the beginning, have introduced a collaborative, non-hierarchical system of work and alternative non-traditional political thinking.

40. In some countries, women have had more success at the local level in reaching decision-making positions. For example, in the local council of a suburb near Stockholm where women's level of participation has reached 40-48 per cent, the political climate in that debate has become more to the point, the language used has become more accessible and women's perspective has been included as part of the basis on which decisions are made.

A. Differences in issues and attitudes

41. The basis for attitudes and opinions is the individual's life experience, and differences between groups can often be traced to differences in experience. Historically, women's experience has been rooted in the domestic sphere. In their daily lives, women often have to seek protection against those who control coercive force, to work out compromises in order to solve problems within their families, to economize the household budget, and to provide health care and nutrition.

42. Women's different life experience, based on their major preoccupation with the home, the family, daily survival, caring, and traditional charity activities, has resulted in formation of different women's values, concerns and priorities. This experience has made them particularly sensitive to injustice and to the needs of those more vulnerable or weaker. It has also helped to develop their particular concern for future generations, justice and the ethical dimension of politics. Thus, women have become natural, important contributors to and beneficiaries of welfare policies.

43. According to opinion polls, surveys and other sources of information in some countries in North America and Western Europe, compared with men, women are less militaristic, more concerned with the preservation of peace and more opposed to any form of increased militarization (in Denmark, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America) or nuclear energy (in

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*The extensive literature on this subject is summarized in Virgina Willis, "Public life: women make a difference", a paper prepared for the meeting of the Expert Group on the Role of Women in Public Life (see also Drude Dahlerup, "Unfinished democracy", paper prepared for the international forum on culture and democracy, Prague, 4-6 September 1991; and Kari Skrede, "From access to integration: women as agents of change in the decision-making process of public policy", paper presented to the twelfth World Congress of Sociology at its special session on women and public power, Madrid, 9-13 July 1990).

Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom). Women more strongly support measures to protect the environment (in Sweden and the United States), to help the economically disadvantaged (in the United States), to improve race relations (in the United Kingdom and the United States), and to regulate and control by law various social vices (in the United States). Women are also more in favour of medical care and gender equality (in Sweden). One cross-national study (in Norway), in addition, has revealed that women are more opposed to environmental and occupational hazards, war, political extremism, nuclear weapons, racial discrimination and capital punishment and more strongly support social welfare programmes and equality issues. 2/, 3/, 4/

44. Such differences in attitudes have often been reflected at the local level, where the interdependence of local politics and the electorate is more immediate and visible, women's presence in public is stronger and women deal with issues of public concern requiring action by relevant decision-making bodies. Women in North America and Western Europe have focused mainly on local aspects of larger issues, such as the protection of the environment (for example, against the destruction of local parks and trees); the establishment of refuges for battered women and of playgrounds and kindergartens for children; and the provision of help to the elderly and the homeless. On some occasions, however, women have taken the lead and have dealt with issues of more general importance such as corruption at the local and state levels; nuclear plants and tests and the stationing of nuclear weapons; and peace and disarmament.

45. While most of the empirical evidence comes from developed countries, there are more and more indications that women in developing countries are also making attempts to include women's issues on public agendas. For example, women's groups in Mexico have campaigned against rape, abortion and domestic violence. In Brazil, action by women's groups has led to the creation of special police stations to deal specifically with violence against women and to a ruling by the Supreme Court that "legitimate defence of honour" is no justification for wife-murdering. In Argentina, a women's campaign for legislation to increase to 30 per cent the proportion of women in parliament led to the adoption of such legislation on 6 November 1991.

46. Women in many developing countries (Fiji, Guyana, Namibia, Pakistan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) are increasingly exerting pressure to insert equality provisions in their countries' constitutions and to strengthen the legal protection of women against discrimination. In conjunction with efforts to end apartheid and to establish a democratic South Africa, the African National Congress Women's League, together with other women's organizations, has worked to ensure that the protection of women's rights is included in the new constitution that is currently being drafted. Women's demand for economic self-reliance has also emerged as a key issue. For example, women in some countries in west Africa have carried out public demonstrations and political action to force their Governments to change their initial decisions to close maquis, local restaurants originally established in courtyards in cities by women migrants from rural areas. As a result, the maquis have been declared not only legal but also important to national economic, political, social and cultural development. 2/

47. Environmental degradation in developing countries has in some cases resulted in increased involvement on the part of women, especially where women, as primary users of natural resources for human subsistence, were among the first groups to be affected by such degradation. For example, in India, women organized the Chipko movement to secure a ban on felling trees and to replant

the available land and manage it properly, as well as to promote the use of energy-efficient ovens and pressure-cookers. In Kenya, the Green Belt Movement focused on planting trees, contributing significantly to the reduction of the effects of deforestation. It also raised public awareness about the environment and promoted a positive image of women and their income-generating activities in tree cultivation and planting. The Kenya Water for Health Organization, a consortium of non-governmental organizations, worked to assist women in making water and sanitation improvements by training them to use and maintain simple water systems; it also implemented a complementary project on health matters. 2/

48. Differences between the attitudes of men and women towards national policy issues have been observed in a number of countries. For example, studies in the United States have shown that women office holders have different attitudes from men regarding such issues as war and peace, economics, nuclear energy, capital punishment, the legalization of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). An analysis of voting patterns in the United States House of Representatives in the period 1969-1983 confirmed those differences, in particular with regard to the legalization of abortion, ERA and child benefits. According to surveys on the attitudes of political leaders towards foreign policy, women were more opposed to militarism and in favour of international organizations. With regard to crime and prison policy, female legislators were focusing more than male legislators on long-term preventive measures and the context of societal opportunities. 5/, 6/ Studies carried out in Norway in 1989 revealed that female parliamentarians identified as priority issues environmental, social and welfare policies, equality, disarmament, education and culture. The priorities of their male counterparts, in contrast, were economic and industrial policies, energy, transportation, national security and foreign affairs. 3/

49. Female parliamentarians, who have traditionally been associated with women's issues, were once mainly involved in the work of parliamentary committees dealing with issues related to equality, social development, health, and education. Those committees were frequently perceived as women's committees and, as a result, it was often thought that they marginalized both the participating female parliamentarians and the issues themselves. Consequently, some female parliamentarians were initially reluctant to become involved in those issues.

50. Once in power, however, many female parliamentarians, having realized that their male counterparts would not give such issues priority, did become involved in the issues. Others, who had been linked throughout their careers to women's issues, felt specially obliged, once in parliament, to deal with such issues as equal opportunity, social services, health care, abortion, child care, domestic violence, rape, prostitution and pornography. Female parliamentarians have tended to take the lead in lobbying, sitting on the committees, writing petitions and sponsoring legislation on those issues in their national parliaments. The record of female parliamentarians in Australia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as in the European Parliament, suggests that women have made a basic difference by keeping equality issues before parliament.

51. Other female parliamentarians, however, have considered the role of keeping social issues before parliament to be too limited, depriving them of opportunities to deal with other issues of interest to them. Some have even

concluded that women's involvement in social issues at the policy-making level have prevented them from addressing themselves to major political issues, such as foreign policy, security, finance, disarmament, issues that should become women's main concern. The fact that in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as in the Nordic countries, women's issues have become well-established items of political agendas of national and local legislative and executive bodies and are increasingly becoming important among the electorate has led to increased interest by male parliamentarians in the issues. 3/

B. Differences in behaviour and political style

52. It has been argued that politics has been defined in terms of male culture, reflected in both attitudes and behaviour. There is some evidence that, when women enter political decision-making postions in large enough numbers, the styles and behaviour of political decision-making change. This may reflect the fact that women's specific private-life experience has helped them to develop their abilities to reach compromises, to set priorities, to find practical solutions, to resolve emerging problems, and to balance competing demands for their time, abilities that can be used in public life as well.

53. Women's involvement in public life is most visible at the local level. One reason may be that local-level activities suit women's working and living styles better and correspond more closely to their culture and daily life. Politics at the local level is less subject to rigid organizational forms, which involve formal meetings and public statements. It allows more informal networking, personal contact, and neighbourhood and community activities, as well as more flexibility with regard to time requirements and the form of action to be taken. Those activities are often temporary, close to home, of immediate relevance to the participants and the community, target-oriented, and problem-solving rather than institution-building. They often take the form of street protests, strikes, petitions, marches, informal gatherings and discussions.

54. Women's different political style has also been noted among female politicians at the local level whenever women have joined the decision-making bodies in sufficient numbers. The experience of local councils in Norway, Sweden and the United States suggests that women create a more collaborative atmosphere, characterized by mutual respect, independent of prevailing political differences, and seek consensus or acceptance among their subordinates rather than a win-or-lose solution. In Norway and Sweden such an atmosphere has influenced the behaviour of men on councils, who have started acknowledging family obligations, speaking a language that was more accessible and acting in a more conciliatory way. Some difference in working style has also been noticed with regard to female parliamentarians. For example, research in the Netherlands has indicated that female parliamentarians are in general more practical, pragmatic and sensitive in dealing with their constituents. They are more predisposed to reaching compromises, to building coalitions with members of other parties, in particular on women's issues, and to working longer hours, in addition to being more diligent in attending party meetings.

55. Some studies have also indicated that women in leadership positions tend to be more concerned than men with the impact of their decisions, in particular their impact on people. Due to their social learning, women tend to develop collaborative rather than competitive leadership styles and less hierarchical personal and institutional relations. They are also considered to be more

democratic, more friendly and more open to change and to be more able to work collectively. Female leaders at the community level have been less bureaucratic and more accessible and open to other people and their ideas than their male counterparts. 4/

56. There is also increasing evidence that the presence of women in elected or appointed offices encourages other women to enter politics. It also results in an atmosphere that is more conducive to women's participation. For example, a study on female mayors in the United States has found that, because of the presence of women, hiring agents have started hiring more women and women in the workforce have begun applying for higher positions. A similar effect has been noted in the case of female judges in the United States. There are some instances in which women occupying political positions have tried to involve or employ other women more often, although this is more often the case in countries in which women are more involved in politics rather than those in which individual women leaders operate in a male-dominated political environment. In the latter, women leaders seem to tend to refrain from appearing to have different styles or values in order to be accepted and to function on an equal basis with men.

III. MEASURES FOR IMPROVEMENT

57. The slow progress in the area of political participation of women, in particular with regard to positions involving decision-making, calls for new measures and policies to radically accelerate the process. The fastest solution would be for women to start making use of the ballot box and to vote for their own interests. Given that women constitute at least half of the electorate in almost all countries, this solution would allow them to elect candidates representing their interests. Although women have a variety of political, social and cultural backgrounds and interests, there are certain issues on which the majority of them hold similar views.

58. One such issue is democracy itself. In some countries, women, regardless of their party affiliation, have joined together to demand and realize equitable representation of both genders at all policy-making levels. The most prominent example is Norway, which, according to most indicators, has the highest proportion of women in public life and decision-making bodies.

59. Norway has a strong tradition of group representation and bargaining in politics. The principle of relevant social representation has long provided legitimacy to different claims for the representation of group interests, furthered from within political parties. The acceptance of the fact that women have specific interests and that traditional "women's issues" belong on public agendas led to the recognition of the need for having those issues and interests represented by women themselves. Consequently, women became a part of the negotiating process taking place in parliament and other public bodies where different interest groups met and decided on power-sharing and organization-based influence. Women's demand for a fair share of power led to an alliance between organizations and groups outside the political parties and women's factions within the parties, the objective being to increase women's representation. In 1970, after a series of campaigns in connection with national and local elections, there was what was termed a "women's coup", which resulted in a majority of women being chosen to serve on three large local councils, including one at Oslo. Although that majority did not last long it demonstrated the power of women's coordinated action; it proved that

common women's concerns exist and that they need to be articulated by women on behalf of women.

60. Since then, women's issues have been further strengthened on the agendas, gender has been accepted as a politically relevant category, certain traditional care services performed by women have been transferred to the State and paid from its budget, and quotas for women have been introduced to public commissions and boards, as well as some political parties. The 1988 revision of the Norwegian Equal Status Act of 1981 provided that in public commissions and boards each sex shall be represented with at least 40 per cent of the members and that in committees with less than four members, both sexes shall be represented. The result was that at present women constitute 35 per cent of all public boards and commissions (compared with 7 per cent in 1967 and 17 per cent in 1977) and hold half of the ministerial posts in the Government of Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland.

61. One measure that can be taken has to do with motivating women to put themselves forth as candidates and to support women candidates for office. It has been argued that this implies that political participation by women must be viewed as a responsibility and not merely a right. The changing atmosphere regarding issues with which women are concerned and, in some countries at least, the emerging competition among political parties for women's votes, together with the increased public attention being given to women's contributions and concerns, have led to the recognition of gender and equality issues as important elements of democracy. Concerned non-governmental organizations should bring this recognition to the attention of women and men alike.

62. One difficulty is that, in many countries, political structures are hard to change. The patterns of political career and selection that have developed based on male patterns may not change quickly. For this reason, many Governments and parties have used targets or quotas as a means of accelerating the process.

63. The above-mentioned Norwegian practice of setting gender quotas for boards and committees was also introduced in the 1980s in the other Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden. That led to an increase in the proportion of women on boards and committees. In the case of Denmark, that proportion increased from 9 per cent in 1975 and 1980 to 38 per cent in 1990. Quotas were also introduced in the 1980s in all five Nordic countries by a number of centre- or left-oriented political parties. That development generally led to an increase in the proportion of women in the elected bodies. For example, the proportion of women elected in the municipal elections in Denmark increased from 25 per cent in 1985 to 29 per cent in 1989.

64. The successful application of quotas in the Nordic countries should be seen in the context of that region, where such values as justice, equality and proper representation of group interests were rooted in political tradition, where women's status and rights were well established and where there was an awareness of women's issues and of the priority of such issues on public agendas. Under those circumstances, the introduction of quotas as a result of conscious and consolidated action by women brought rapid results and helped remove the effects of past discrimination in some areas of political participation.

65. Under different circumstances, however, without sufficiently developed women's consciousness and networking, sensitivity to gender equality and

advanced women's status in society, the introduction of quotas and targets, in particular "from above", has proved to be inefficient or even counterproductive. Thus, the introduction of such measures should take place only when initiated by women themselves and preceded by activities aimed at raising women's consciousness; increasing their interests in and knowledge of politics, the political process and their rights; and encouraging their active participation in all spheres of public life, including the establishment of networks and lobbies comprised of female politicians, members and functionaries of political parties, trade unionists, members of non-governmental organizations and grass-roots organizations, scholars and researchers.

66. In general, the introduction of quotas as a form of affirmative action remains a controversial measure. Its opponents question its limiting character and non-democratic nature. Its supporters consider it the most efficient measure they have ever used. There is, however, growing consensus that corrective mechanisms are needed to redress the prevailing inequalities and discrimination in political participation and that some form of affirmative action should be taken. Because of the activities of some political parties, women's groups and female politicians, the subject was recently raised in the national elections of a few countries, including Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. As a result of such discussions, public awareness increased and other political forces felt obliged to take steps to attract support from female voters and to improve the status of female members of their own parties. One result was that a number of parties put up female candidates and promoted issues of concern to women.

Notes

1/ Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

2/ "Identification of possible issues to mobilize women to participate in public life", paper prepared for the meeting of the Expert Group on the Role of Women in Public Life, Vienna, 21-24 May 1991.

3/ Virginia Willis, "Public life: women make a difference", paper prepared for the meeting of the Expert Group on the Role of Women in Public Life, Vienna, 21-24 May 1991.

4/ Virginia Sapiro, "Women and public life in the United States", paper prepared for the meeting of the Expert Group on the Role of Women in Public Life, Vienna, 21-24 May 1991.

5/ Center for the Study of American Women and Politics, Women Make a Difference (Rutgers, New Jersey, Eagleton Institute of Politics, 1983).

6/ S. Welch, "Are women more liberal than men in the US Congress?", Legislative Studies Quarterly, vol. X, No. 1 (1985), pp. 125-134.

Annex

DRAFT PLATFORM RECOMMENDED BY THE EXPERT GROUP ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

1. The meeting of the Expert Group on the Role of Women in Public Life, held at Vienna from 21 to 24 May 1991, recommended for adoption by the interregional consultation on women in public life, which was to be held at Vienna in 1991, the draft platform presented below.

2. Public life means participating in informal and voluntary activities at the community level, as well as participating in formal positions of public responsibility and public office. The two are closely linked. Public policy reflects the interests of all people in society and women's involvement in key decision-making positions is essential.

A. Women's rights and responsibilities with respect to participation and leadership

3. The participation of women and men in public life on the basis of parity should be a priority objective of Member States because of the principles of human rights incorporated in the Charter of the United Nations and guaranteed by most national constitutions. The participation of women and men on the basis of parity is the prerequisite of the social contract.

4. Participation is the responsibility of all citizens. Effective solutions to international, national and local problems can best be found when all citizens can exercise on an equal basis their right to participate fully in the decision-making process.

5. Although women have always been part of the political process and have always contributed to the public good, they have not necessarily participated at the decision-making level. This has been true in crises involving national construction or reconstruction, in liberation struggles and in daily life, especially in terms of the contribution women make to the national economy, regardless of whether it is reflected in government statistics.

6. Women constitute a key national resource, whose ideas, creative solutions and concern for the cohesiveness of society can help change the quality of public life. Their contributions introduce an enriching dimension to the substance and process of policy-making. Women's exercising of their right to have equal access to positions of public responsibility will make public life more representative.

B. Strategies and instruments for political action

7. All nations must seek remedies for the underrepresentation of women in public life. Specific dimensions of the problem differ from country to country. Although institutional structures and opportunities for participation vary widely, steps must be taken to ensure equal participation. There is one clear and common factor: women are generally absent from the key areas of decision-making. Strategies must deal with constraints that women face at the individual and institutional levels, as well as in the context of the values held by society. It is necessary to remove constraints that stem from a legacy inimical to women's inclusion in order to facilitate women's full participation.

8. Both long-term and short-term measures are necessary; such measures include educating girls and boys in their shared civic rights and duties. Society as a whole, including parents, schools and the media, has the responsibility of preparing future generations to accept and encourage equality.

9. To promote equality, steps must be initiated immediately to promote the full participation of women in public life.

10. The low number of women in decision-making positions illustrates that they have not been made equal partners. Strategies to promote the full participation of women should include:

(a) Modifying institutional structures to reflect and facilitate participation on the basis of parity;

(b) Stimulating public awareness of women's right to participate and the benefits they bring to the quality of decision-making;

(c) Using the ballot box as a means of promoting women's rights, interests and concerns;

(d) Establishing targets, goals or quotas to ensure equal participation on the basis of parity;

(e) Encouraging incentives for equality through national and international public policy; Governments that provide financial support to the electoral process should design such support to provide incentives for equal participation; international agencies that provide assistance in areas with a major impact on women should ensure that such assistance encourages equality in decision-making;

(f) Encouraging methods of support, including training, at the local, national and international levels;

(g) Calling upon experienced women leaders to contribute actively as important role models;

(h) Reinforcing cooperation among women by emphasizing information exchange and mutual support and by developing tactics to identify and realize common objectives;

(i) Removing demeaning stereotypes, ensuring that the portrayal of women by the media is fair and objective, and including women in all decision-making processes of the media;

(j) Implementing all United Nations recommendations to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions;

(k) Expanding national and international statistics and research efforts to include gender-disaggregated data on women's political, social and economic activities in order to reflect the reality of their contributions; the full range of women's contributions to society should be reflected in media and curriculum reform at all levels of education;

(l) Ensuring the equal participation of women in areas of the private sector that have a direct effect on the public.

11. These strategies require advocacy and monitoring not only by national bodies, but also by United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations.

C. Women's contribution to politics: public issues with women's perspective

12. All public issues are of concern to women. Some issues have a particular link to women's distinctive experience and concerns. While the specific issues of concern will differ from country to country, depending on the specific circumstances, and should be defined in each national context, there are broad themes that unite women everywhere. These generate the added and distinctive values and approaches of women in policy-making.

13. Women's special contribution to public life has been said to include:

(a) A particular concern for justice and the ethical dimension of politics derived in part from their having experienced injustice;

(b) A talent for setting priorities and accomplishing complex tasks learned in the course of balancing competing demands for their time and attention in the family, at work and in the community;

(c) An awareness of the value of consensus and agreement because of their central role in social relationships;

(d) A concern for future generations.

14. Women have always known about problems in society that have either been ignored or considered merely "private" issues. Women in public life have helped to transform these problems into issues of public concern. Women in leadership roles can help make policies more appropriate to deal with these problems.

15. The de facto denial of the right of women to full participation may be considered in the context of the broader issue of basic human rights for women. This has heightened the awareness of the need for fairness and justice as a motivating ethic in public life.

16. Women's lack of self-determination is an obstacle that women should feel compelled to overcome. At its most extreme, this lack of self-determination is constituted by violence against women in the family and elsewhere in society and by the debasement of women through pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation. Similarly, many population policies do not respect women's health, well-being and basic human rights as set forth in international conventions.

17. Women are particularly concerned with determining the course of the common future of humankind. While many of today's problems are the result of decisions in which women did not participate, tomorrow's solutions should be designed today with the full participation of women.

18. It is incumbent upon women to provide innovations in public life and to propose new styles of cooperation among the peoples of the world. This implies the formulation and defence of a new international order that bridges the gap between developed and developing countries. A healthy, productive economy is a goal for women who bear an especially heavy burden due to poverty and

underdevelopment. One of women's future tasks is to be the spokespersons of a new ethic that will be the basis of international law.

19. Women recognize the significance of adequate public investments in education, social services and the conservation and management of the natural environment as a way of preparing today for the future.

20. At the international level, women must demand that their concerns are reflected in all debates on the future of the world.